

March 17

Judges 2 – 3

As we dive into the second and third chapters of Judges, our eyes begin to open up to a pretty sad cycle beginning to gain steam. In a just a couple of pages, a lot of damage is done. However, we also see that where a lot of damage is done, deliverance takes place.

One great truth that I want for us to notice about this passage is that behind every chapter, every paragraph, and virtually every sentence in the Book of Judges, is the amazing truth that the Lord is Sovereign throughout history. He is definitely controlling what is happening here. Israel, we are told, forsook the Lord and provoked the Lord to anger -- so the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them -- He sold them to their enemies all around. The political and military reversals suffered by Israel during the long period of the Judges, and right up until the time of David, had nothing to do with the relative strength of the Philistines living in the prosperous cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. Israel's problems were all divine judgments. When a nation stops acknowledging God, He allows them to get into all kinds of hot water, primarily so that He can once again get their attention. That is the story of Israel and I can't help to think that this could be our story as well.

Second, I think it is important to notice how God confronts the nation of Israel in this. You need to know that God always confronts sin. My hope and prayer, however, is that we will take a lesson from the people of Israel on this one and respond more appropriately when He confronts us than Israel did. They cried out to God in desperation, and knew where they had it wrong, but they didn't change -- not even a little bit. As we will read on later in their history, a disobedient king was going to hear a very important little sentence. Maybe we can learn it now -- it says, "To obey is better than sacrifice!!" It's obvious that Israel hadn't learned that as we read the Book of Judges.

I also want you to notice the progression noted in chapter 2. First it says, "A generation grew up who didn't know the Lord or what He had done for Israel." No wonder Moses and Joshua both had so much to say about remembering. A generation without personal dealings has now come along and they forgot what God had done! I wonder if it was the fault of the parents who were too busy to teach the children or of the children who were too busy to listen. In all probability it was both.

But when you forget what God has done, you stop giving Him glory -- then they did evil and then they involved themselves in idolatry. Chapter 3 hints that the idolatry could very well have been a direct result of mixed marriages with the people of the land.

One interesting thing that was noted was the fact that Ehud was left handed. Although this may be something that is easily overlooked, it does have some significance. Ehud's left-handedness is noted because it was a sign of being cursed in that culture to be left-handed, so no one was. If you were left-handed by nature, you learned to be right-handed. Since a left-handed person would strap a sword to the opposite thigh than a right-handed warrior, Ehud was able to slip his weapon past Eglon's guards without being detected. It's cool how God works, isn't it?

Very quickly, the writer of the Book (traditionally it has been attributed to Samuel), settles into a pattern. Each section starts with this statement, "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord..." Judgment in the form of domination by some foreign oppressor followed, and after a long period of domination the Israelites cried out to God and He raised up a deliverer and the land had peace for a period of years, until once again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord.

There is a cycle portrayed in this introduction that we will see played out over and over again:

Israel forgets God -- Israel forsakes God -- Israel worships other gods -- God sends judgment upon Israel -- Israel cries out to God -- God raises up a deliverer -- God saves Israel -- Israel pledges to serve God. Then it starts all over again!

These folk were on a terrible, terrible treadmill. It is my great prayer that we would look at our lives and if we are on that same treadmill, our study of the Book of Judges will help to get us off.